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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES STRATEGY ROLL-OUT WITH
RELIGIOUS COUNCIL LEADERS

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ambassador Mussomeli met with Ulema Council President Shinwari on December 3 to discuss President Obama's December 1 speech and to address any questions Shinwari might raise regarding the President's policy. Shinwari said the President's speech was good and the Ulema Council supported the President's strategy as outlined in his speech. Shinwari also pled for U.S. assistance to help resolve Afghan-Pakistan tensions and encourage Taliban reconciliation. END SUMMARY.

Ulema Council - "We Support the U.S. Strategy Here"

2. (SBU) Ambassador Mussomeli met with Shinwari and four other Ulema Council members in Shinwari's office to amplify and respond to questions regarding the roll-out of our strategy for Afghanistan. (NOTE: the ULEMA Council advises President Karzai on Sunni religious matters and has 3,000 members nationwide. END NOTE). Shinwari warmly greeted the Ambassador and, when the Ambassador mentioned President Obama's speech, produced a Dari version. Shinwari informed the Ambassador that he and his fellow Council members had discussed the President's speech, and agreed with his message and strategy. Shinwari noted that the Ulema Council's Sunni religious leaders scattered across Afghanistan consistently resisted Taliban demands that the Council declare Karzai's election illegitimate and that they call the Afghan government a puppet of the United States. This resistance had come at a cost, he noted, sharing that 36 Council members have been killed by the Taliban.

3. (SBU) The Ambassador expressed sympathy to Shinwari over the deaths of his fellow Council members, deaths caused for speaking the truth. He voiced appreciation for their willingness to tolerate the presence of foreign troops for so many years. Ambassador shared conversations he had held with Cambodians while serving there, noting that the one thing Cambodians have never forgiven us for was leaving them in 1975 which set the stage for the ensuing holocaust engineered by the Khmer Rouge. The Ambassador said that the United States would not make a similar mistake here. He added that we are aware that we had neglected Afghanistan after the Soviets departed and that it was unfortunate again when U.S. attention shifted away from Afghanistan to Iraq. Ambassador Mussomeli assured Shinwari that we were now committed to Afghanistan for the longterm.

"Help us Solve Our Corruption, Pakistan Problems"

¶4. (SBU) Shinwari then shifted to the topic of Afghan-Pakistan tensions, saying that without U.S. help, the issue would never be resolved. He pointed to Pakistan's ISI as the principal architect of the problems between the two countries. The Ambassador pointed out that President Obama had promised in his speech to increase support to Pakistan and that the United States would be firmer with Pakistan in the future.

¶5. (SBU) Turning to corruption, Shinwari told the Ambassador that Afghans sought our help in fighting corruption. He noted that corruption is a problem involving both the Karzai administration and Americans and that we should jointly confront all corrupt actors, regardless of nationality. The Ambassador told Shinwari that in the United States approximately 600 U.S. government officials are prosecuted for corrupt practices every year. "That's the point", responded Shinwari, "We want to see the same here!"

"Taliban Reconciliation is Important"

¶6. (SBU) Shinwari next emphasized the need for reconciliation with the Taliban. He recounted his recent trip to Kunar Province where he had asked local leaders who

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was fighting for the insurgency in that area. He was told that the fighters were Wahhabis (implying those engaged in combat operations were foreign fighters and not Afghans) paid by Pakistan's ISI. Ambassador acknowledged that insurgents took up arms for a variety of reasons and agreed reconciliation was possible with many in the insurgency.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Ulema Council President Shinwari was very receptive to our message in the meeting, repeating several times that the Ulema Council agreed with Obama's speech and supported our strategy. The Ulema Council's role as arbiters of religious matters gives the Council an important role in national discourse. Further, its network of members throughout Afghanistan ensures that their positions on issues are widely disseminated. We believe that the warm reception Shinwari gave us will pay future dividends as we continue to roll out our message on the U.S. strategy to decision makers in Afghanistan.

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